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ABSTRACT

Current practice in competitive public-address events limits the value of the student's educational experience in several ways. The most frequently observed and easily addressed problem with contemporary practice is that event rules/descriptions do not indicate what judges expect to observe in those events. Unclear rules/descriptions are of little help in telling students, coaches, and judges what to expect in the event. This ambiguity may help explain why lay judges disagree with contest coaches in determining which speech should be rewarded. Additional problems limiting the value of the forensic experience may be found in the types of speeches represented in competitive individual public address. The current events demand three types of delivery: impromptu, extemporaneous, and memorized. The fourth generally recognized type of delivery, manuscript, should also be required, as well as other forms of persuasive speaking. Further limitation of educational value may result from the evaluation of student performance in the competitive arena. Judges need to have more time to draft ballots with fewer contestants packed into panels. It would be helpful to increase the amount of judge-contestant interaction by allowing a specific time period after each presentation for questions and answers. The forensics community needs to adopt changes which will assure the educational value of competitive public address events. (Twenty references are attached.) (MG)

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Public Address Events:

Maximizing Educational Value

by

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a paper presented to
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This paper presents a critical perspective on the current practice of public address individual events. The focus is exclusively on nationally offered events, with particular focus on those events offered at the National Forensic Association and American Forensic Association championships, since those championships dominate the prevailing practice at intercollegiate tournaments.

The paper claims current practice in competitive public address events limits their educational value. It questions the relationship between current rules for such events and judge expectations/contestant practices as a factor which mitigates against student participation. It also examines event selection as a factor limiting the contestants' education. The paper claims the current approach to competitive public address events encourages evaluations based on delivery, organization, and oral style rather than on the critical thinking, research, or quality of evidence and argument provided by the contestant.

The paper also suggests alternatives to the current national schema of six public address events. It challenges the forensic community to derive a set of events which challenge contestants to more fully broaden the scope of their public address skills. Finally, the paper challenges forensic organizations, program directors, and contest judges to adopt a judging paradigm which recognizes the necessary primacy of content in evaluating competitive public address events. Fifteen specific recommendations follow the text of the paper.

Public Address Events: Maximizing Educational Value

"Some men see things as they are and say, why;
I dream things that never were and say, why not?"
—Robert F. Kennedy

This paper presents a critical perspective on the current practice of public address individual events at intercollegiate forensics tournaments. Readers will note criticism is largely directed toward the practices of baccalaureate-degree granting institutions, though many comments apply to community college forensics as well. The focus is exclusively on nationally-offered events (National Forensic Association and American Forensic Association events) for two reasons: (1) those events are most likely to be offered at intercollegiate tournaments (Hawkins, 1990, p. 25) and (2) this paper cannot go on forever. The objective of this paper is to spur consideration of alternatives to contemporary practice, especially as such alternatives may enhance the educational value of participation in individual public address events. Most of the recommendations proposed at the end of the text are outgrowths of the author's interpretation of recommendations from the First Developmental Conference on Forensics (Schnoor & Karns, 1989, pp. 48, 69-70).

Current practice in competitive public address events limits the value of the student's educational experience in several ways. The most frequently observed and easily addressed problem with contemporary practice is that event rules/descriptions do not indicate what judges expect to observe in those events. Additional problems limiting the value of the forensic experience may be found in the types of speeches represented in competitive individual public address. Further limitation of educational value may result from the evaluation of student performance in the competitive arena.

rules/descriptions

That event rules do not relate well to current practice or expectation is hardly a new or startling criticism; indeed, the problem has been observed so frequently that raising it here may appear unnecessary. At least as early as the Second Developmental Conference on Forensics and as recently as the First Developmental Conference on Individual Events critics questioned the validity of then-current event descriptions (Parson, 1984, pp. 87-93; Dunlap, 1989). Unfortunately, the 1984 adoption of basic standards for evaluation of public address events by the Second National Developmental Conference on Forensics (Parson, 90) did not bring about a significant clarification of rules and expectations. For the incoming student, beginning coach, or inexpert judge (even those with some competitive background), the rules for impromptu, communication analysis/rhetorical criticism, and after dinner speaking may appear obtuse. While the rules for persuasive speaking, informative speaking, and extemporaneous speaking may appear more lucid, they do not reveal what most contest judges expect or reward in those events.

The rules for impromptu, rhetorical criticism/communication analysis, and after dinner speaking are inadequate because they are unclear, incomplete, or inaccurate. There is no indication in the impromptu rules that a student may use no more than three minutes to prepare, but commonly judges are uncomfortable with students who use more time in preparation. Both contestants and topic writers appear confused by the phrase "of a proverb nature." If the topic is expected to be a thought-provoking quotation, the rules should so indicate. Most of my students who read the rules for rhetorical criticism/communication analysis are utterly unable to appreciate them; they find the wording unrevealing. Some effort

toward clarification of the type of rhetorical artifact to be addressed or the type of methodology to be used would help the unfamiliar chart their course into this event. (It is also true that for students who do understand this event, the limitation of ten minutes to make a statement they have prepared for months is particularly onerous. Professionals who face eight-to-twelve minute time limits at professional conferences should be able to appreciate the need for more time to allow a more comprehensive and comprehensible statement.) The rules for after dinner speaking are worse than those for either impromptu or rhetorical criticism/communication analysis; they are a lie. Despite specific prohibition against a comedy monologue, most judges reward (immediately with laughter and later with rank and rating) comedy routines on a theme at least as much as they reward well organized and thematically developed amusing speeches with a specific, ascertainable purpose and thesis. If comedy routines are what we want, we should recognize that preference in the event rules and descriptions. If they are not what we want, judges should enforce the current regulations prohibiting such routines.

Persuasive speaking rules do not specify a problem-solution speech, nor do they specify the student must address a proposition of policy and motivate the audience to action. Yet that act is what most judges expect and reward. A student who wishes to inspire or to convince, to reinforce or refute has no viable forum in this event. We tell students who are bothered by the crudity and lack of grace in contemporary American society that there is no room for their concerns in this event because they cannot legislate a viable solution. The student who wants us to enrich our lives by listening to public radio or reading quality literature is discouraged from this event because the problem is less pressing than colo-rectal cancer. The

student who wishes to set the record straight by refuting a statement or article advocating a particular position would be better served by writing a letter to the editor of her or his local newspaper than by preparing a speech of refutation for presentation at contests.

In informative speaking the student who strays from fairly narrow expectations fares no better (unless she or he is enrolled in a community college and competing at community college tournaments). Because judges expect an expository speech or a process speech the student who tells us how to repair a roof or how to decorate a cake is not rewarded. The student who explains how Christopher Columbus used the experiences of prior visitors to the new world has no forum. We discourage the student who wishes to explain the layout of a medieval castle or take us through the Grand Canyon. There is simply no room in contemporary practice in informative speaking for demonstrations, speeches of description, or analyses of historical events or forces. [For descriptions of these types of speeches as well as types of persuasive and entertaining or occasional speeches see Ehninger, et al., 1986; Nelson & Pearson, 1987; Rodman, 1986; Samovar & Mills, 1989; Verderber, 1988; and Wilson, Arnold, & Wertheimer, 1990.]

The extemporaneous speaking rules/description tell the student how much time she or he will have, but are no help at all in identifying a topic area. While my generation may have been able to research semi-adequately for extemp by keeping up with Time, Newsweek, and U. S. News (with an occasional glance at Current History, Congressional Digest, or Business Week), both the breadth of news coverage and the number of available resources has skyrocketed since that bygone age. What in the rules precludes a Superbowl, World Series, or Academy Awards question? What in

the rules or description prepares a student for a question written last July? It is unrealistic to expect contestants to be ready for whatever we throw at them, but that is the nature of the contemporary extemporaneous speaking experience. A potential solution is to restrict the topic range either to a broad topic areas (e.g -education or the environment) or to a time period (e.g.-current events from the past 90 days). This sort of topic limitation would likely help contestants prepare more intelligent statements in response to extemp questions. Such limitation would also allow judges to do meaningful background reading, which would enable them to write more informed ballot critiques.

The point of the above discussion is not that the events are bad or even that the judging standards ought to be changed (that comes later), but that unclear rules/ descriptions are of little help in telling students, coaches, or judges what to expect in the event. This ambiguity may help explain why lay judges disagree with contest coaches in determining which speech should be rewarded—the contest coach knows the hidden agenda of expectations not explicit in the event rules. If we demand the ambiguity, we must reward diversity. If we limit what we will reward, we should at least be honest enough to admit it in the event rules/descriptions.

event selection

The types of speeches which have evolved into national competitive public address events may also be problematic. Two are general purposes for speaking: informative and persuasive. Two are types of delivery: extemporaneous and impromptu. One is a task: criticism or analysis. One is a setting: after dinner. We actually have at least four types of persuasive speaking: current events (extemp), problem-solution (persuasion), humorous (after dinner), and evaluative (criticism/ analysis). While it may be

argued that the selection of offerings includes the traditional triumvirate of purposes for speaking (to inform, persuade, and entertain/mark an occasion), there are a number of types of speeches which are ill-suited to contemporary competitive practice (see persuasion and informative, above). While A.F.A flirted with the sales speech as an experimental event and N.F.A. recognizes it as a qualifier for persuasion, a student would be ill advised to take such a speech to nationals. What is a student to do with an elegy? An award presentation? A speech of praise or blame? Nothing inherent in these speeches makes them less suited to the competitive setting. There appears to be no reason they are less worthy of attention.

More important, what educational objectives do the current sextet of public address events reveal? If we justify competitive individual events as an educational activity, a laboratory where students struggle to master the argumentative perspective, then we should take steps to assure a fuller and more rational experience for those who compete. To serve our students well, we should offer events which broaden their experience by training them for a wider range of tasks. For example, while some of our students will be broadcasters, we offer no newscasting events. There may be some carryover value from extemporaneous speaking (especially as that event encourages broad research into a variety of contemporary issues and encourages distillation of that knowledge into a relatively short time period), the event is not analogous to the type of tasks broadcasters must perform. Within the same format (thirty minute preparation period, seven minute presentation) students could cull wire service clippings into a demonstration newscast. There is no reason public address events cannot more readily utilize the experiences of the students who are supposed to derive benefit from them.

Public address events should serve as an educational laboratory where students develop and refine communication skills which will serve them throughout life (McBath, 1975, p. 11; McBath, 1984, pp. 9-11). Their educational objectives should be readily apparent to others within and outside the education community (Greenstreet, 1989). While there is certainly educational value in the current events, they omit a tremendous variety of situations which students may be expected to encounter. Current events suggest students will have months to prepare and memorize persuasive speeches which they will deliver hundreds of times to anonymous audiences who will remain mute throughout the presentation. The current events demand three types of delivery: impromptu, extemporaneous, and memorized. If we require these, why not also require the fourth generally-recognized type of delivery (manuscript) as well (Nelson & Pearson, 1987; Rodman, 1986; Samovar & Mills, 1989; Verderber, 1988; and Wilson, Arnold, & Wertheimer, 1990)? Current events allow students to inform, persuade, and entertain. Why not commemorate, demonstrate, or refute? Why not eulogize or castigate? [For a rather extensive discussion of both the value of specific events and the potential for alternatives, see Hunt, 1989; Dunlap, 1989; Haught, 1989, Mills, 1989, and McKiernan, 1989.]

methods of evaluation

Contemporary methods of evaluation also limit the educational value of public address events. The major problems are unrealistic judge expectations, poorly designed ballots, and an emphasis on illusion rather than substance. Rather than a substantive and thoughtful analysis of the statement the student authors, the tournament format demands from judges a spontaneous critique of what they thought they heard from the most recent of as many as fourteen competitors. To preclude the tournament

director's biases from influencing the judges, an unstructured ballot frequently offers no guidelines for evaluation (even when the Evanston conference evaluation criteria are used, there is no indication of their relative importance in assessing the overall value of the speech). After a seventy five minute period judges are expected to scurry back across campus, pick up another packet of ballots for a different event and repeat the exercise. This task is often repeated as many as six times a day; sometimes it is broken up by judging rounds of debate.

Among the more obvious problems encountered in the above scenario is the expectation that judges will be able to differentiate between or even focus on as many as nine presentations in a given round. Listening closely is a task which requires concentrated effort; it is an absolute prerequisite to writing a helpful ballot critique. Effective listening is not likely under the conditions described above. An obvious solution is to provide more time for judges to draft ballots and to pack fewer contestants into panels. It would also be helpful to increase the amount of judge-contestant interaction by allowing a specific time period after each presentation for questions and answers. Each of these solutions makes tournaments run less quickly; they may mean some rounds run long and some judges and contestants are late for the next round. Solutions to such problems are within the capabilities of tournament directors. Is our purpose to conclude by 6:30 Saturday evening or to educate?

Yet another problem is the expectation that judges have developed sufficient expertise to draft thoughtful critiques of a variety of types of speeches on all possible topics. Of course, judges cannot possess such expertise. Indeed, one of the things we teach our fundamentals students about expertise is that it is limited to particular areas (Ehninger, et al.,

1986; Nelson & Pearson, 1987; Rodman, 1986; Samovar & Mills, 1989; Verderber, 1988; and Wilson, Arnold & Wertheimer, 1990.) For example, while Henry Kissinger would be an expert on foreign policy, we discourage our students from quoting his views on surfing. Yet in event after event we expect judges to have something intelligent to say about students' performances. This problem is most apparent in communication analysis/rhetorical criticism, an event which can make professionals who have spent a lifetime developing their rhetorical sensitivity and their ability to appreciate and use language feel inadequate. While professional educators in speech communication ought to have some passing familiarity with rhetorical theory, it is unrealistic to expect them to have read and memorized the methodologies of every assistant professor who has had an article accepted in a regional journal. In a typical round of communication analysis/ rhetorical criticism, a judge may hear six different topics analyzed through six different methodologies. Does this judge have time to review articles in the university library? Is this judge allowed to examine manuscripts of the students' speeches? Of course not—she or he probably has another round in five minutes. The result of the problem of expertise is that judges write about what they know about: organization, style, and delivery. Ballots emphasize the packaging, but not the content, of student speeches. Solutions here require a more fundamental reform in the way we operate. Communication analysis/rhetorical criticism could require contestants to focus on a particular genre of artifact each year (e.g.-political campaign speeches; farewell addresses; architecture) or to choose from within a range of methodologies to be used for analysis. Extemporaneous speaking has been addressed above.

A second problem is in the lack of clear evaluation criteria. Without criteria, ballots produce random comments about whatever strikes the judges (Jones, 1989, Tucker, 1989). A student may easily go through a tournament without any comments about the content of their presentation. Especially with a speech which obviously is not going to be represented in the elimination rounds, judges may write a generic encouraging ballot in the hope that they will not discourage the contestant ("Good energy level. Pleasant speaking voice.") What such a ballot also assures is that they will not help the contestant develop a more competitive speech or a more rational statement. The solution to this problem is one which the forensics community has not been willing to accept, and it is a problem deeply rooted in the discipline. In order to use a rational ballot the forensics community must develop and prioritize evaluation standards (Allen & Dennis, 1989). Until speech communication professionals decide what they want to teach and how they will know when they have taught it (through observations of contestant behaviors) they will be unable to develop and prioritize meaningful criteria for the evaluation of public address events. Until such criteria are developed and prioritized on ballots, evaluations will continue to randomly emphasize whatever struck the judges; they will continue to focus on presentation rather than content.

Such emphasis on what the student appears to be doing rather than the content of the speech is further assured by the format of presentation. While oral footnoting is helpful in establishing credibility, it does little to assure adequate research (Friedley, 1990). A single magazine article may contain several different opinions from several sources. Listening to citations of those sources may mislead judges to conclude that the student's research has been adequate. In the worst case, a student may plagiarize a

speech entirely from an obscure source. At best, oral footnoting is often incomplete (most commonly omitting qualifications, dates, or the name of the publication). These pieces of information are not generally necessary in a speech—but they are critical to an assessment of the content of the student's statement. If public address events are to serve as an educational laboratory then the format of their presentation needs to make education possible by allowing thoughtful evaluation (Schnoor & Karns, 1989, pp. 69-70). Here too the solutions require radical restructuring of the way contests are administered. While it is neither desirable nor necessary for students to submit manuscripts for speeches which are not yet in their final form, by the time the district/regional/state/national championships roll around a manuscript is both reasonable and helpful. In events where it is appropriate—and those are all events where delivery is expected to be memorized or from a manuscript—judges should have a manuscript available for review. Indeed, such review should be routine at the highest levels of competition.

conclusion

This paper has reviewed a number of criticisms of contemporary practice in competitive public address events at intercollegiate speech tournaments. While current practice appears to provide for considerable diversity in student effort, this paper claims the appearance does not reflect reality. The paper further claims unrealistic demands are placed on both contestants and judges. The ultimate impact of the demands placed on judges is a reduction in the value of their criticisms of student speeches. The paper urges the forensics community to establish clear educational objectives for public address events and to place a high priority on encouraging students to develop the content of their speeches (rather than

only the organization, style, or delivery). The objective of this paper has been to improve current practice, not to denigrate it. Current practice in public address events is valuable and provides a direct outgrowth for the speech communication curriculum. Public address events can help students learn to communicate with clarity, cogency, and force. The purpose of this paper has been to encourage the forensics community to adopt changes which will assure the educational value of competitive public address events. After all, as we concluded at Evanston,

> There is nothing inherent in a forensics program that insures positive educational outcomes.... Forensics viewed as a set of games for exhibiting verbal skills is educationally questionable and forever at risk. But forensics defined as a practicing liberal art whose essence is the creation, testing, and communication of knowledge is consonant with purposes of the academy (McBath, 1984, p. 9).

summary of recommendations

Public address event rules should be modified to clearly state expectations for student performance.

1. Impromptu rules should specify maximum preparation or minimum speaking time. They should specify the nature of the topic to be addressed.
2. Each year, rules for communication analysis/rhetorical criticism should include parameters for either subject area or method of analysis. These rules should also allow fifteen minutes for each presentation.
3. Either rules for after dinner speaking should recognize the validity of a comedy monologue on a theme as a form of humorous address or judges should enforce the current prohibition against such monologues.
4. Each year, persuasion rules should specify the type of speech expected (e.g.-motivate, actuate, convince, inspire, refute).
5. Each year, rules for informative speaking should specify the type of speech expected (e.g.- expository, demonstration, description).
6. Each year, rules for extemporaneous speaking should specify a topic area or a time period from which topics will be drawn.

Public address events should be selected to maximize the educational experience of the contestant by demanding mastery of a variety of skills unique to each event.

7. Each year informative, persuasive, special occasion, and entertaining speeches should be offered.
8. Public address events should be relevant to the experiences and expectations of students who participate in those events.

Directors of tournaments offering public address events should provide opportunities for thoughtful criticism of student performance.

9. Tournament directors should limit the number of contestants per section to no more than six.
10. Tournament directors should schedule sufficient time for judges to draft thoughtful critiques of student speeches.
11. Tournament directors should explore means of increasing contestant-judge interaction during each round. Corollary 11-a: Judges should recognize the necessity of keeping the tournament on schedule and keep such interaction within permissible time tolerances.

Public address individual events should be evaluated primarily on the basis of content, with lesser attention to organization, style, and delivery.

12. Forensics organizations should cooperate to develop criteria for evaluation which recognize the primacy of content in evaluating student speeches.
13. Forensics organizations should develop ballots which prioritize criteria for evaluation of student speeches.
14. In appropriate events, forensics organizations should provide a mechanism for evaluating the manuscripts of student speeches at their championship tournaments.
15. Judges should utilize the criteria provided for the specific tournament and organization both in drafting their critiques and in ranking and rating student speeches.

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